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All That I Could Save

The Forgotten Poetry of Eric Atkinson

Having been written half a lifetime ago and recovered and set to music with AI assistance. Of that poetry of my youth, of those distant days and thoughts set down in ink on paper, this is all that I could save.

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This is a project that I had never expected to undertake. My old poetry is... often best left in the past. Best to leave it there. Best not to dig up ghosts.

I had been working on a theme album about mimics, those treasure chests that love to chomp greedy adventurers (but which can actually be anything) and I remembered my old poetry. I never had the voice for recitations, and I wondered how it might sound. And now, here we are.

There is a good deal of debate over whether AI created content qualifies is art, and a hundred people may very well yield a hundred and twenty different opinions, and I won't settle that for you in a single paragraph.

For me, though, art is where you find it, and what you see in what you find. I have not the skill to play the instruments I own, nor the vocal command to sing or recite. But I can, it seems, write lyrics. And I see the comparison between AI generated music and that produced by vocalists and musicians as the difference between photography and painting- both of which I do.

I do not pretend that a soulless machine can ape or even equal a human artist in any field. There is no replacing training, skill, talent and humanity. But what it can do, is bring an idea to life that would otherwise never be realized. An idea like, "What if there were an entire album dedicated to mimics?" or "What would my old poetry sound like if put to music?

These poems go back in some cases over twenty years. That's a long time to reach back. Some are vaguely-remembered favorites, all are shards of my past and tokens of another time. It's memory and nostalgia and the poetry of someone who, in many cases, should have known better. Join me, won't you?

The Rose or the Thistle was never one of my flashier poems. The image that accompanies it, however, is so vivid in my mind that it almost seems I'm remembering a painting. The image is of a weathered statue of an angel, kneeling at the side of an overgrown pool or fountain, holding out both hands. In one is a thistle, in the other a rose.

My memory keeps insisting that I painted this, but I know that never actually happened.

There is another memory. I'm sitting at the table at my grandmother's house, after she'd left for the nursing home, never to return. I'm sitting at the dining room table and reading or perhaps even writing the poem.

She, my grandmother, always talked about coming back home; but all of us knew that would never happen. I stayed up there and watched her house for a while, until the house was rented out. My family still owns it, but I haven't been there since. None of us want to go there, or to see it anymore.

THE ROSE OR THE THISTLE

A crimson petal falls
It settles-
On water green with algae
Its petals, the thistle cannot shed.

She holds them both
Over the enlichened fountain basin
In lichen-colored hands
The thorns can't scratch the stone.

The perfume of so much rampant life,
Nothing lives there to smell
Nor see the riot of discordant colors
Nor wonder at the ancient cracked fountain

Still inexplicably filled
Over which the angel
Holds the two, in hands of stone, -
The rose or the thistle?

As if a decision
Not YET having been reached
Would discard the one in shimmers of crystalline green
And the other bear off to an unknown place

The angel kneels as if to choose,
The thistle or the rose.

A Prayer For Love is one of the few poems I wrote that a recording exists of me actually reciting. Back in the day, I would occasionally read something I'd written out loud. This rarely happened, however. I've never had the voice for reciting poetry.

I do love to read to people, however. I may not have the voice for it, but I love to do it anyway and seldom have the chance.

The origin of this poem's name is a bit of a mystery. It doesn't quite match the contents, or not in any way that is clear. The best I can do here is to suggest that it did at the time, but exactly how is lost to the intervening years.

I do remember that the mental image I always had of this poem was of a glowing ball of light, a will-o'-the-wisp, floating and glowing cold and pale in the night, guiding a traveler along deserted roads. Once again, the link with the title is lost.

Perhaps I implied that the idea of love was a guiding light in the darkness, that would not fail though all other lights went out. We will never know.

A PRAYER FOR LOVE

A tiny flame, upon the wind,
An ember in the dark,
Come and light the way for me,
O faint and fitful spark;

Come and be a guide to me
O, come and be my light-
For darkness presses close around,
And the terrors of the night.

A tiny flame upon the wind,
But all the hope there is
In this dark and dreary place
Where scarce a hope yet lives.

Come and light the way for me,
Come hover by my side,
And lead me not astray from here,
As others have, and lied.

A tiny flame, upon the wind,
An ember in the dark,
O come and light my way for me,
My faint and fitful spark.

Make Us Whole has a romantic sound about it, doesn't it? It implies yearning, needing, wanting, being incomplete. This was a little joke of mine. You see, "Make Us Whole" does indeed carry that romantic connotation for me... as it did when I first encountered it while playing *Dead Space*. And when I hear the phrase, I don't think of the legal meaning. I don't think romance. I think about my time trying to survive the horrors of the ISG Ishimura. To be honest, I never fully understood all of the lore about the Brethren Moons and Convergence. The joke is that, underneath the lyrics, Make Us Whole is a reference to *Dead Space*. Underneath this romantic, sentimental, yearning poem lies horror, blood and death. And you'd never know from the lyrics themselves.

This is actually a shortened version of the poem, missing five or so stanzas. It was reduced for technical reasons but I thought it was pretty and emotional enough that I allowed to remain part of the album. As a former gamer, I always had a soft spot for the poem.

MAKE US WHOLE

When I cannot find the words to say what I would say,
When my own thoughts elude me and I find no prayer to pray,
When I would grasp what can't be grasped and force it on a page,
The play moves on but I alone stand still upon the stage

Still because I cannot speak the words that you should hear,
Still because I cannot grasp what you mean to me, my dear

Still because the world moves on and nothing stays the same,
Still because the rules may change but will never change the game
[Will never change, will never change]

I think back on all I've done and all that I have seen,
Lighting candles for lost lovers, and those lost in between,
And incense for the silences, and in those silent hours-
The revenants surround me like the scent of ancient flowers

Because I reach out to touch you, and I cannot feel your skin:
Because I whisper to the darkness and your name is lost within

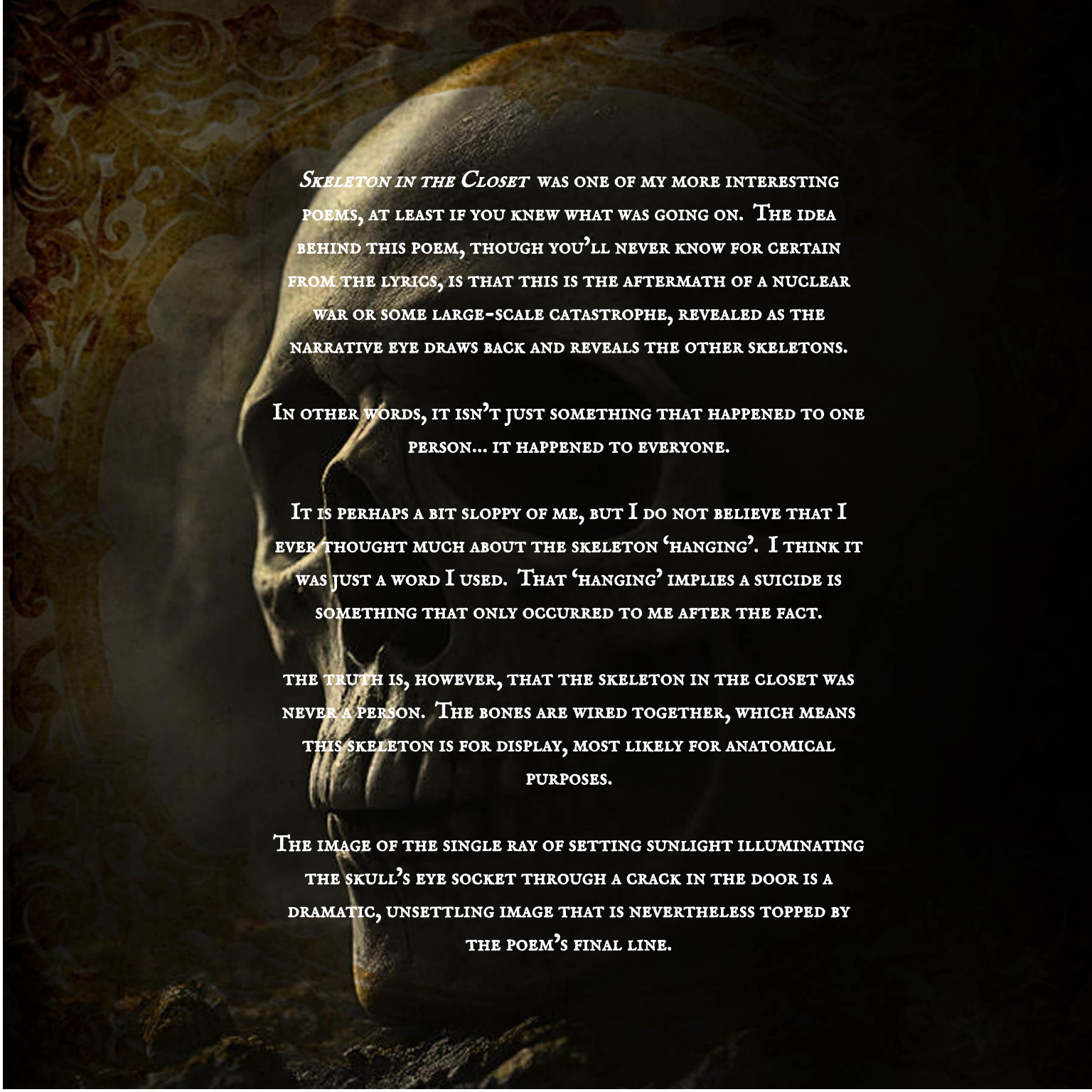
We are broken, and we wander, under strange and distant stars
We are riven of self and soul, and eyes cannot see the scars

Together what is it we've made? Together, or shall we part?
Together how that make us whole? Is it the end or start?

I will not desert you, as my words deserted me
I will be yours to hold, to talk or touch or see

The words that I knew all along, and feared to think or say,
The words that in my mind and heart are safely locked away

Unknowing and uncertainty, that weighten down the soul
And lastly, now and softly, the whisper 'Make us whole'



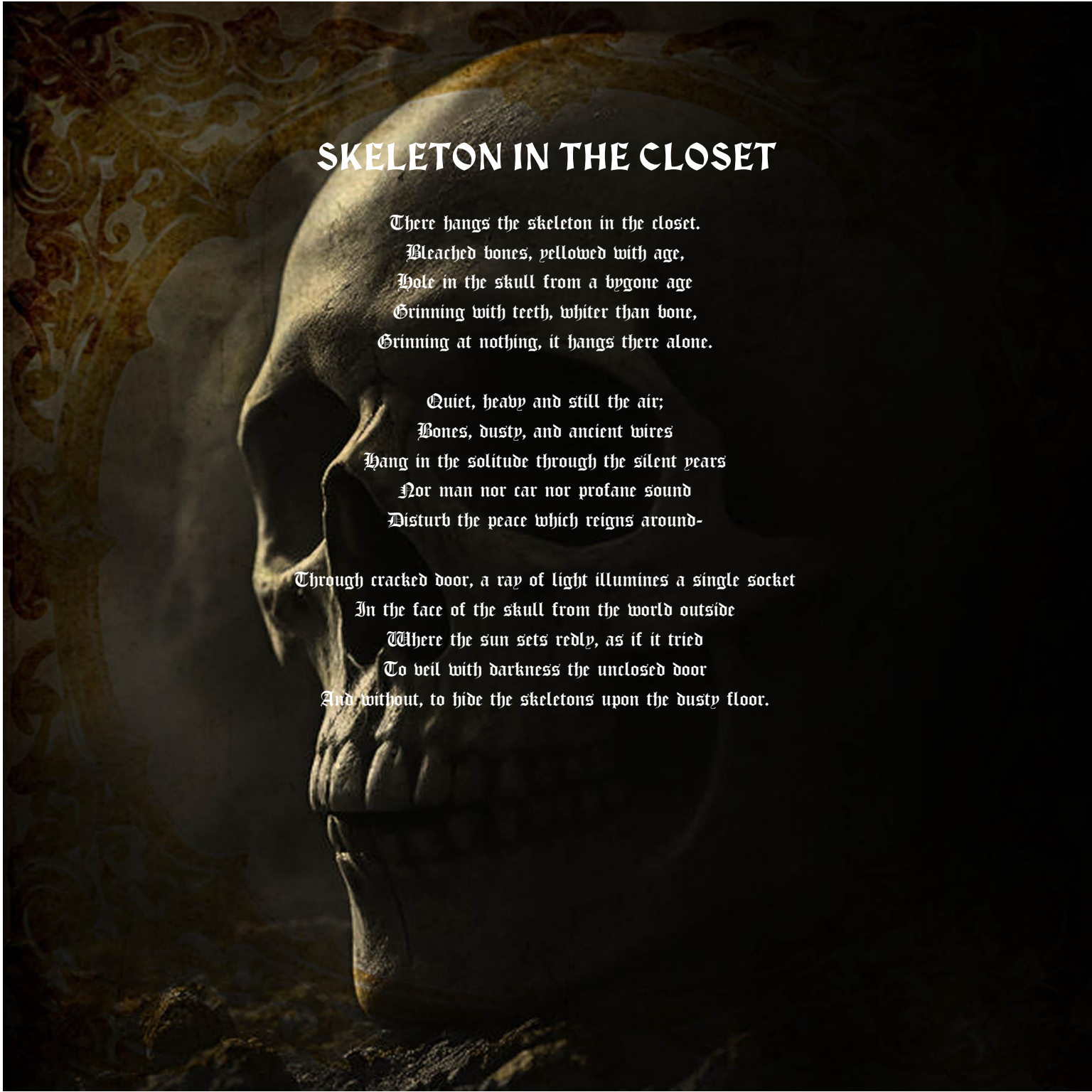
Skeleton in the Closet was one of my more interesting poems, at least if you knew what was going on. The idea behind this poem, though you'll never know for certain from the lyrics, is that this is the aftermath of a nuclear war or some large-scale catastrophe, revealed as the narrative eye draws back and reveals the other skeletons.

In other words, it isn't just something that happened to one person... it happened to everyone.

It is perhaps a bit sloppy of me, but I do not believe that I ever thought much about the skeleton 'hanging'. I think it was just a word I used. That 'hanging' implies a suicide is something that only occurred to me after the fact.

The truth is, however, that the skeleton in the closet was never a person. The bones are wired together, which means this skeleton is for display, most likely for anatomical purposes.

The image of the single ray of setting sunlight illuminating the skull's eye socket through a crack in the door is a dramatic, unsettling image that is nevertheless topped by the poem's final line.



SKELETON IN THE CLOSET

There hangs the skeleton in the closet.
Bleached bones, yellowed with age,
Hole in the skull from a bygone age
Grinning with teeth, whiter than bone,
Grinning at nothing, it hangs there alone.

Quiet, heavy and still the air;
Bones, dusty, and ancient wires
Hang in the solitude through the silent years
Nor man nor car nor profane sound
Disturb the peace which reigns around-

Through cracked door, a ray of light illumines a single socket
In the face of the skull from the world outside
Where the sun sets redly, as if it tried
To veil with darkness the unclosed door
And without, to hide the skeletons upon the dusty floor.

Stained Glass was included in one of the old, hand-made and bound books of poetry I used to make. This particular collection was titled, after one of the poems it contained which has not been put to music, *The Seas are made of Glass.* This was from 2007. 18 years ago, as I write this. That's long enough for someone to be born, grow into an adult, even get married and start a family.

All that time, between then and now.

The book contained a tiny drawing, a quick sketch that accompanied this poem and after a search through my archives I discovered I still had the image file, where I'd drawn and scanned that illustration for that handmade book so many years ago.

There is a hint here of a broken relationship and destroyed love. That is... coincidental. Just tarot imagery, just me being romantic without romance, just drama.

But art being art, the reader -or listener- will find that which is within themselves, and interpret accordingly.

STAINED GLASS

Tiles and tiles, green and blue,
Orange, yellow,
And stained red in the dying light

Late is the hour under the setting sun;
The plaque read 'The Lovers'
But everything is orange or red or black.

The fires cannot scorch the cool stones of the wall
And rays only fall to the floor
In twisted and tortured patterns

A crack; a clink; a crash
But the light is gone.
Only stars peer around jagged edges.

The Creature hasn't necessarily aged all that well. For a long time, this was my very favorite poem- at least among those poems that I'd written myself. Its message is muddled and its internal logic suspect, and it's me saying that.

But the story the poem tells, about the war, the shrine to the fallen, the corruption of the shrine and the appearance of the creature. Imagine being in a mausoleum or the catacombs beneath a church, and suddenly all of the bones start coming together and building themselves into skeletons that begin to get to their feet. Forget the creature, the skeletons alone are pretty nightmarish.

This was a difficult adaptation for music, especially AI music which had problems adapting to the slightly shifting rhyme scheme. Modifications were necessary, nothing major but words had to be changed.

The result, though not with the rhythm, cadence or spacing that I would have used, has a kind of energy that just isn't found in the other adaptions which mostly favor and intend a slow and solemn, almost thoughtful recitation.

I find that I like it.

THE CREATURE

And now the dreadful tale is told as best one can impart,
Of the history and legend that in no small part
Can be called a tale of terror to chill one to the bone-
For these were strewn about the creature's makeshift throne;
For all about the center as in some nightmarish dream,
Victims were all strewn about in worship of their king.
Now, from the vault wherein his grisly scene does lie,
The eye draws back through stone and wood and gazes from the sky
Upon the ruined monument with desolation 'round
Where everything is dark and gray and nothing makes a sound.

It was not always so this sight would have been seen;
For once the living countryside was deep and vibrant green-
But between the space of years that divide the now and then.
There was a war and what was left did not resemble men.
In having died disfigured and missing head or limb.
And the field, dyed red with blood was left to vultures and the wind;
Then things came and fed upon the dying and the dead,
Misshapen things that screeched and writhed, things whose eyes glowed red;
By the dawn bare bones remained, nor any trace of blood
And a shrine upon the spot was built with stone and built with wood
And story changed to legend and was then in time forgot.
For They had built it with their hands and hearts and understood it not
And there they brought the bones of all who on the spot were slain.
To the shrine they brought them and laid them there again.
Then over time there crept upon the shrine so bright and clean
A dirt and darkness mostly felt and only barely seen.
The place grew shunned until one day, the keepers all alone.
Were wakened by a rattling sound of moving bone on bone.

For the dead that slept therein were sleeping now no more,
Joining into skeletons, bones skittered on the floor.
And joined together into shapes they once had been.
Thus, the dead of the battlefield began to walk again.
In their midst a creature rose, and it rose from out the ground;
But for the rending of the earth, it rose without a sound.
It was a shrouded, formless thing, a thing with teeth and claws.
And it sprang upon the keepers there without the slightest pause;
This same fate befell all men who ventured to that place.
Specters only prowl there now, pale things without a face

From time, decay and weight above the timbers finally gave;
The shrine fell in and became at once a ruin and a cave-
Nowadays upon the wreck few tiny saplings grow;
Shapeless things still stalk at night but only rarely so.
The story is passing into legend and that soon will pass away
And it will be forgotten on some far-off future day.
But the buried thing sleeps not and when its hour comes again
It will rise from out the home built for it by naive men.

When legends are remembered it is often far too late
Thus, man condemns himself unto his own unerring fate.

Roses, along with thistles, are a common theme that winds its sinuous way through even my oldest poetry. The rose, in addition to its romantic connotations, encompass one of the most fundamental lessons of life: "Every rose has it's thorns."

There's always a catch. With pleasure comes pain. The beautiful outside and the sting waiting within.

It should come as no surprise that poems featuring or centering around roses or rose-imagery find their way into many of the poems contained within this album.

There's an interesting and obscure reference contained within this poem. "Come away" is actually a reference to the Silmarillion, to Feanor's speech before the Noldor, where he urged them to forsake the blessed realm and return with him to middle earth, to help win back the silmarils from Morgoth, to whom Sauron was merely the greatest of his servants.

References like this can be found throughout anything I write, but were especially prevalent in my poetry- in those nearly forgotten days when I was actually enthusiastically writing it.

I never was comfortable with "a-looking," however.

THE FIELD OF ROSES

Looking out across a field
With roses in the sun
There's more a-looking than just my eyes,
And it wants to have some fun.

The roses are a deep dark red,
And they have no thorn, just leaves;
The scent steals away the senses,
As though a band of thieves

Come away with us, just come away
And be in another place
Meet me there, where rules are unfair,
And we can be face to face

In the field of roses nothing matters that's outside
Consciousness is stripped to where desires cannot hide
And everything that you think and know-
There's only what's inside.

The roses blow in the scented wind
Beneath the unjudging sky
It is their purpose but to be therein
And not to live or die

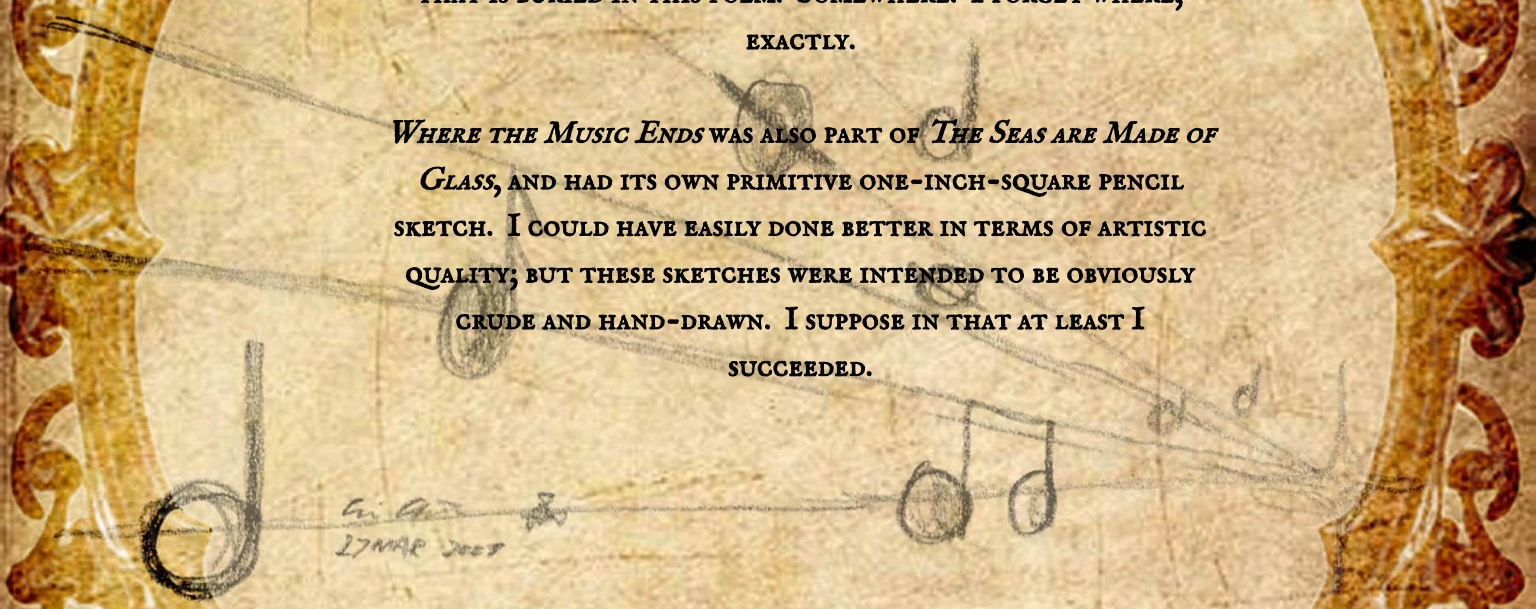
In the field the roses blow
And with them the desires go
Freed from regret and from pain
Where the reaper need not sow

Meet me in the field of roses
Where desires and actions are free
It's such an interesting place-
And what happens, we will see

There is a collection of poetry by Shel Silverstein called *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. I've never read any of it, though in retrospect its difficult to understand why.

Although I've never read it, I had heard of it years ago when I wrote this poem and had a vague notion in my mind: not of anything specific in that author's collection but of how the idea of the sidewalk ending made me feel, and part of that is buried in this poem. Somewhere. I forget where, exactly.

Where the Music Ends was also part of *The Seas are Made of Glass*, and had its own primitive one-inch-square pencil sketch. I could have easily done better in terms of artistic quality; but these sketches were intended to be obviously crude and hand-drawn. I suppose in that at least I succeeded.



WHERE THE MUSIC ENDS

Light the candles, only to burn,
Play the music, only to hear
Keep them all to yourself, because
You're the only one whose here.

Drink the wine that's set aside;
Be happy while you can
When it's gone, it's over and done,
Its ending all again

Because now the party's over,
When you missed that it had begun;
And now you have to clean up too,
Wish you were having fun-

Now the candles all burn out,
And played the sound to silence
It's just a little quiet thing,
With no feeling or violence

Where therein might lie a passion,
No passion, only silence
With the last few wisps of smoke
And echoes where the music ends;

Ends...
(ends...)
(ends...)

How might it feel to be a statue, forgotten and fouled by birds? Long before hate-fueled mobs of miscreants were desecrating and defacing historical monuments in 2021, I speculated upon the lot of a forsaken statue.

There's something special about monuments. They are things we can look up at and wonder, or contemplate, or even derive a warning that a thing must never be repeated.

The reason I so object to the disgraceful wretches that defaced and destroyed statues of philosophers, explorers, soldiers and heroes, is not solely because many of them for all their faults were of better men than I, nor was it with the utter contempt that any who would destroy art rightly deserve and earn through their vile actions. It was for the lessons lost forever to current and future generations. Love, creates. Hate, destroys.

But in a way, is it not sadder to be left to ruin and decay, forgotten and abandoned to crumble unremarked into dust? And how, if a statue could feel, must such a statue envy the freedom of the birds? In the long term, mere entropy is just as destructive and far more inexorable than any hate-fueled criminal.

Is it worse to be destroyed... or to simply fade away?

THE STATUE'S LAMENT

Which of us here have not the time
To watch the supple ivy climb?

Nor to ponder how it grows
The moss we feel beneath our toe

The tears the fountain formerly shed
These years we've watched, still as the dead

Must we watch forever without pain or lust
Until we've all crumbled into the dust

Must we stand forever in this silence
With no choice save that of calm compliance

All is ruin that we can see
We have only each other for company

And these cursed dirty birds
Mocking with meaningless screeching words

Their freedom in the endless sky
While we repose where we stand or lie

Oh, that lips of stone could curse them back
They that mock us with what we lack

Our lament in frozen stone!
Formless, nameless, unheard, unknown

How many times have you wished you could say the part that you kept silent, or that you had when you had the chance? How many times did you let the silence speak, in place of the words you should have spoken?

A personal question, but a rhetorical one. I, who never tell everything, have often wished that I had, or that I could speak that which is not spoken, that I had said that which I could not say.

Let's try again. Have you ever loved someone and never told them?

There was no specific thing, no specific person that inspired this poem. But I do love the wonderful imagery, of thoughts like the ghosts of butterflies, fluttering through the halls of thought until they fade away.

But you cannot know the future any more than you can change the past. Sometimes the wisdom of today turns in the course of time into yesterday's folly.

And you're left wondering, why did I do that? Why didn't I do this instead? Why didn't I say what I should have said?

Why?

WHY?

There are always words left over,
Always things unsaid,
Like ghosts, they haunt the waking thought
In the dark inside our heads.

Why did we let the silence
Speak, but not our words,
Which now away are locked forever,
Unspoken, and unheard?

So few words that mean so much,
So precious, and so true-
Would we still keep you to ourselves,
If, then, we only knew?

Now locked within the halls of thought,
They beat their wings and die,
Those words, like phantom butterflies,
And the whispered question, "Why?"

Moira is a complicated topic. Given how much of my earliest writing was about, for or to her it's surprising that only one of those poems found its way into this album. Or perhaps not.

Actually, a lot of those early poems are missing. Which is to say there are still physical copies somewhere in my archives but the file copies have vanished. Don't ask me how.

But Moira.

Our lives are shaped by countless influences, whether we will it so or not. We remember the big ones and forget the small, but all are strokes that shape or mar the stone of our lives. The further back the influence, the more fundamental and inseparable- the more it shapes who and what we are.

Most people have someone, I suspect. Someone who more than anything or anyone else, made them who and what they are. They may celebrate it or curse it or never stop to think about it. For me, that someone is Moira.

Sometimes friend, sometimes lover, sometimes nemesis, though mostly the former and the latter. It is with less than usual poetic license that I say, for better or for worse, Moira's smile will haunt my steps so long as I live, outlasting perhaps even my memory.

That smile isn't always pleasant. But it is part of who I am.

MOIRA'S SMILE

I see a lot of things in that picture.
The pixels, the whole greater than their sum;
The eyes, the smile,
And I stare at it some little while

There's so much more it says
A thousand roses, -
And their thorns,
The blood and the tears,
The lights, the joy -

The lines, long crossed,
Mistakes long made and shoved aside;
Memories fall like snowflakes
Piling up, filling me,
An embrace, a kiss, a caress, a whisper;

A sentence, wrapped in pain and instant suffering
And for what?
All of it, for what?
For a moment's embrace that lasts forever in its finality,
Twisted into timelessness by repetition,

An embrace before parting?
But there is still that smile,
Still those eyes,
Wrapped up in pixels
And words of disguise,

The cascade of hair on her shoulders, -
I touch;
Her hair, her lips, her cheek
But there's only the familiar smooth, flat surface,
Lit by candlelight and imagination;

For everything it contains, it's still just a picture,
And there is no warmth of skin in it.
I touch
The lips, the smile, frozen in time,
Behind glass,
Smooth and cold and hard.
?"

I still have pressed flowers, and four-leaf clovers and things. My copy of Aleister Crowley's *The Book of Thoth* is full to this day of ancient, fragile rose petals. Far too fragile, most likely, to use for the purpose that saw them preserved.

Flowers are ephemeral things, beautiful but fleeting. Like beauty itself, they fail and fade and are gone.

All of life is a struggle against entropy. We fight to live, fight to look young, fight to lose weight, fight to keep our hair. In the end, of course, all is for naught; the Reaper awaits, and we are food for the worms.

Perhaps we see ourselves in those flowers. Perhaps we know that our youth and beauty fades, that we wilt even as the blossom, that we become old and bent even as the flower's stem droops in death. Perhaps, on some level, preserving them as best we might is symbolically preserving ourselves.

I don't know. I merely speculate. And I suspect most people don't spend too much time thinking about it. And I can't argue. It is unhealthy to dwell too long upon the fate of everything that lives and breathes, and on what if anything comes after.

Our minds are not built for that.

PRESSED FLOWER

Such a fragile thing
Delicate colors,
Delicate hues
Thrown together,
In purple and blues

Now so fragile all the more
Desiccated into two dimensions
Frozen fragrance-
The ghost of a fragrance-
Like ashes of ancient incense

Passionflower, passion long past
Black eyed Susan, the shade of a glance
Ghosts of never-been bouquets
Preserved forever
For years more than days

Such are the entombments of beauty;
This is how a flower dies.

This poem is practically unique among the long-forgotten poems of my youth.

Old Marlowe's Grave isn't dark in the same way that *Write a Poem for Me* or *The Creature* is dark. It's a sentimental poem about a groundskeeper remembering his predecessor.

I don't know where I got the idea. I can't point to any one bit of inspiration from which the poem stems. I do remember that, as with much similar poetry, I started with the idea and let the words come. Quite often, it would seem that the poetry wrote itself and all I did was to manage the rhymes at the end of lines.

I began with the phrase 'Old Marlowe's grave is overgrown', regardless of where it came from. It felt antique and nostalgic and, yes, sad. As sad, in fact, as sad can be.

It is a poem of common things, not great or dark or secret but mundane; and in its mundane story lies its beauty.

Although I do feel that his grave being overgrown is more properly ironic than simply sad. He battled the weeds all his life; in the end, the weeds conquered even his grave.

OLD MARLOWE'S GRAVE

Old Marlowe's grave is overgrown,
'Tis sad as sad can be;
In light of the epic battle fought
Between the weeds and he

The lonely stone is covered
With lonely climbing vine
Behind the hut, roof fallen in,
That was his home, and mine

Old Marlowe got the biggest blooms
On flowering bush and tree
And lived he in his little house
With little company

A little man was he, with time
More for plants than men
He had a beard and long white hair,
Which he combed once now and then

Dead these twenty years, or more
Alone in the cold, cold ground;
The grounds grew up with briar and weed,
With only wind for sound.

Old Marlowe's grave is overgrown,
The stone's more green than gray;
None keep the grounds here anymore,
"'Tis haunted now," they say

The big house is a ruin,
But having years left to fall;
The ivy covers every nook
In a climbing free-for-all

They say he walks the paths at night,
Paths no one can see,
Pruning dead fruit trees dead long ago,
Now only rotting stumps of trees.

Marlowe's grave is overgrown
And time has taken its toll;
Oh, God in heaven, wherever You be,
God rest old Marlowe's soul.

This poem brings back memories. There's a story I tell involving this poem that I use as an example of how each person sees Art differently.

A long, long time ago in college, I took a creative writing class on poetry. It was an utter waste of money... except for this one, single lesson. There was an assignment where each student brought in a poem, distributed it to the class and the class would analyze and discuss it. I chose this one.

The class discussed it, and then they told me what the poem was about. Everybody thought something different. Some saw a funeral in it. Someone saw a wedding. No two answers were the same. No two people thought it meant or was trying to say the same thing.

And all of them were wrong. It wasn't trying to say anything. There was no message or metaphor. It was just imagery strung together. Just pictures and words. An experience with no message or point.

But everyone interpreted it in terms of their own beliefs, prejudices and experiences. Each student saw in it what they wanted to see. Each one manufactured their own reality in regard to what I had "meant".

On this day, I learned the nature of Art. That art's meaning lies not in the domain of the artist, but in that of the viewer. What the artist meant matters... only to the artist.

WHITE

White
White like lilies, white like bone
White candles on the altar without ornamentation

Sickly yellow in the light of the flickering flames
A sound on the edge of hearing
Familiar but unplaceable

There is a name on the altar
The name is your name

There is blood on the altar
The blood is your blood
There is a soul in the balance
Neither to the left nor the right

Suspended between the pillars in the mirror
Patiently burn the candles
All the time in the world
Because the world revolves around them

In the center are the candles
Pale wax drips in shapes
Covering the blood in white

To say that I remembered this poem from years ago is a tiny bit misleading. I remembered it, alright... but what I remembered was the title. Those two little dashes to either side are part of the title. And "Res?" What does Res mean? I know Rez with a Z. That's a PlayStation 2 Music Rhythm game (since re-released on other systems, and even ported to VR. You should play it if you get the chance.)

But Rez and -Res- are entirely unrelated.

I think it was just a word that came into my head at the time, one that had a sound and a feel but no actual meaning. Which fits the way I often did things when writing poetry once upon a time.

It's fun to speculate, sometimes, and to wonder WTF was I getting at? We have cold days and hours, resurrection, ghosts, and flower petals falling on a rainy day. What does it all mean?

But sometimes, what I was getting at wasn't a message but a feeling. Sometimes I didn't tell a story or invoke a message but tried to capture a feeling, something that could not be put into words in an ordinary manner, into images that invoked feelings.

So what does it all mean? The answer, of course, is that's up to you. It means whatever it wants you to means. That's all the meaning any art ever has, if you think about it.

-RES-

Colder days and colder hours
Falling petals of dying flowers
Falling as if they were snow,
Falling with forgotten happiness

There comes a time to rise again,
With the blowing of the wind
But not every phoenix will arise
And neither every soul.

Falling into waste and doubt
Many get in; few get out
Many are the shades of men
That walk the earth silently to-day.

Falling petals all around
After this there's just the ground
Once upon a rainy day
When no sun would shine.

I had said that roses were a theme that appeared through my poetry, and the trend continues. This is, however, the last poem in this album that has the word 'rose' in its title. I promise.

The Rose differs in that it doesn't use the rose as a symbol of romance or the other side of the coin (that is, the concept that every rose has thorns) in the service of some image or message or feeling or metaphor.

This poem addresses the rose directly. It doesn't use the rose; the rose is what the poem is about.

As always, a good deal of poetical license is taken to idealize the rose.

Finally, a bit of trivia for you. "Quick" in this context does not mean fast. It means "living." You don't see this usage very often and as far as I know it's limited to artistic and poetic uses. Somewhat archaic, it is.

I also must reluctantly admit that, for the moment, I am thoroughly sick of roses.

THE ROSE

Instead of crimson roses,
These be a quicker red.
There are no smooth and slender stems,
But thorny ones instead;
And for perfume of fragrance,
Blood and sweat and tears
And no such lighter token
For distant, long-gone years.

For the rose is a badge of honor,
And the thorns are pain and grief;
And a lover's scent and tears of joy
Are in memory all too brief.
By blood on the hand that grasps it,
Taken, or gotten in trade,
Cherish the rose that is held in the hand
And the lives by which it is made.

We are not yet free of roses it seems. They're like an infestation; they get into everything.

In all seriousness, this may be my favorite poem in the album. The imagery is wonderful, there's little in the way of cringe, it flows well... and it's based in truth.

Not that it was a request... It may have been, but after all this I have no idea. No, I'm referring to the mix of blood in the writing. Because, I did do things like that.

Not in the manner the poem implies, I never wrote in ink. But occasionally the pencil lead would be dipped in blood. You do silly, dramatic things like that when you don't know any better. I remember that I'd also occasionally heat the pencil lead in a candle flame until it glowed red, (it cooled quickly) and then write with it.

To a certain extent, these practices are things normally found in spell work, and there was some crossover. I did and still do believe in magic, you see, though I rarely employ it as it tends to be more trouble than it's worth. It makes sense that I would employ little rituals in my writing, not for the sake of the outcome but for the sake of the process.

Because magic, like art, is where you find or make it.

THE PAGE OF POETRY

Write a poem for me, she said,
And so, I found a pen
Its tip stained black with ink and blood,
And now, to write again

There's a bottle of ink, as black as night,
And into this, the pen
Is thrust, and then the surface closes
Over where the pen had been

There is a paper, virgin white
And in scars of midnight black
The words are traced, and accents placed,
As the ideas are trapped;

Trapped and shackled to the page,
For now, for ever more,
Uncertain in their stark certainty,
But trapped forevermore

So cast upon the waters,
Cast upon the page,
The words lie in their ordered lines,
Each one in its own grave

They tell the story of the rose;
They cry out, and you must hear;
But their symphony is a subtle one,
Not altogether clear.

Written with a heartless pen
In midnight scars on white
The story told is of life and pain,
And of love which somehow makes it right

The words lie in their ordered rows,
Each character a scar;
These are the thorns, and they are found
Wherever roses are-

But in the words lie beauty;
And therein lies the soul
However fully it be revealed,
Be it in part or whole

Write a poem for me, she said,
And it is written with a pen
Dipped in ink that's mixed with blood,
And dipped in ink again

There is Drama in Desolation. I would come to love the Fallout games, especially Fallout 4 with it's settlement building system that I poured nearly a thousand hours into. But all that came later.

The Broken Windchimes channels the same energy as *Skeleton in the Closet* and *The Statue's Lament*. Whether I properly conveyed this or not I do not know; but personally, I can almost hear the dull clanking of the broken, rusting bells and bones as the decaying pieces of windchime blow in the wind.

This is not the abandonment of the forgotten statues, or skeletons left lying because there was no one left to see to them. In this, we see through the scarecrow's eyes. Scarecrows don't last long. Someone built it or placed it there.

This, then, is the abandonment of things seen so often they are no longer noticed. This is the person who is alone in a crowded room. This is the picture on the wall that has been there so long no one notices it. This is the car rusting in the yard that will be fixed "one of these days."

It does beg the question, however... why hang windchimes from a tree in the middle of a field? Who is going to hear them? Who is going to see them? Are we looking at the aftermath of some kind of symbolic or ritualistic act? Maybe hanging a homemade windchime from the tree ensures a good harvest or keeps the deity of the fields entertained?

Who can say?

THE BROKEN WINDCHIMES

In empty field from ancient oak
The broken windchimes hang;
No breeze rustles the stiff, brown leaves
To accompany dull clinking and rain of rust.

The dead bells hang like forlorn gibbets,
Themselves hung from the hangman's tree
Until a wayward breeze has blown
And played the scarecrow's skeletal symphony

It may be in other fields,
In other times the bells rang clear
And bright, like faerie laughter after spring rains
But see, what time hath done!
See, with the scarecrow's button eyes

The ancient, rotten rustling things
Their broken rings and rusted chains
And what neglectful time can do
-And shall to me, and shall to you-
And hear the music of hanging bones;

Yet still some tokens few remain:
A shiny stone, a fleck of paint,
A copper sun, corroded green-
Of brighter days, strange and distant
When winds whispered secrets to faithful leaves
And limbs swayed, with music of bells

Inside the Mirror was also in *Seas are Made of Glass*, and also had a quick hand-drawn sketch that accompanied the text. It's a good thing, too.

When I was reviewing and collecting poetry for this album, I came across a poem I didn't remember, that didn't have a title. Because of the text, I tentatively titled it *In the Mind* and marked it for inclusion under that title.

When a Poem was saved without a title, it usually meant that it was written for a specific purpose, usually to include in a longer document or project. Either that, or at the time I didn't think it was worth titling.

I'm not certain which is the case here; but obviously I thought enough of it to sketch a quick illustration and put it in a collection.

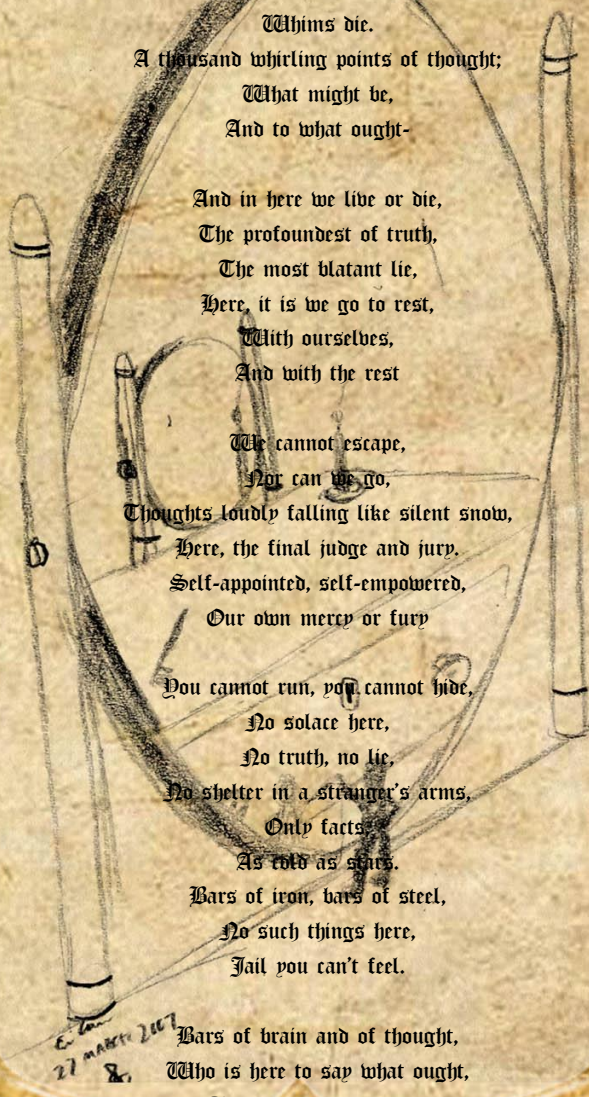
Several days later I was looking for a poem I remembered but didn't have a file copy of called *The missing Key*. It, too, was in *Seas are Made of Glass* and while I was looking it up, I found a poem called *Inside the Mirror* listed in the index.

In the Mind is, I think, a much better fit for the poem, but I went with the original.

I wonder if perhaps this poem was purpose-written for that collection. Perhaps I needed one more poem and nothing existing seemed a good enough fit. I suppose we will never know.

The vocals here have a unique sound to them. I know it's the AI's doing and not mine, because I handled the lyrics and merely provided oversight, editing and approval for vocals and instrumentals; but I like them anyway.

INSIDE THE MIRROR



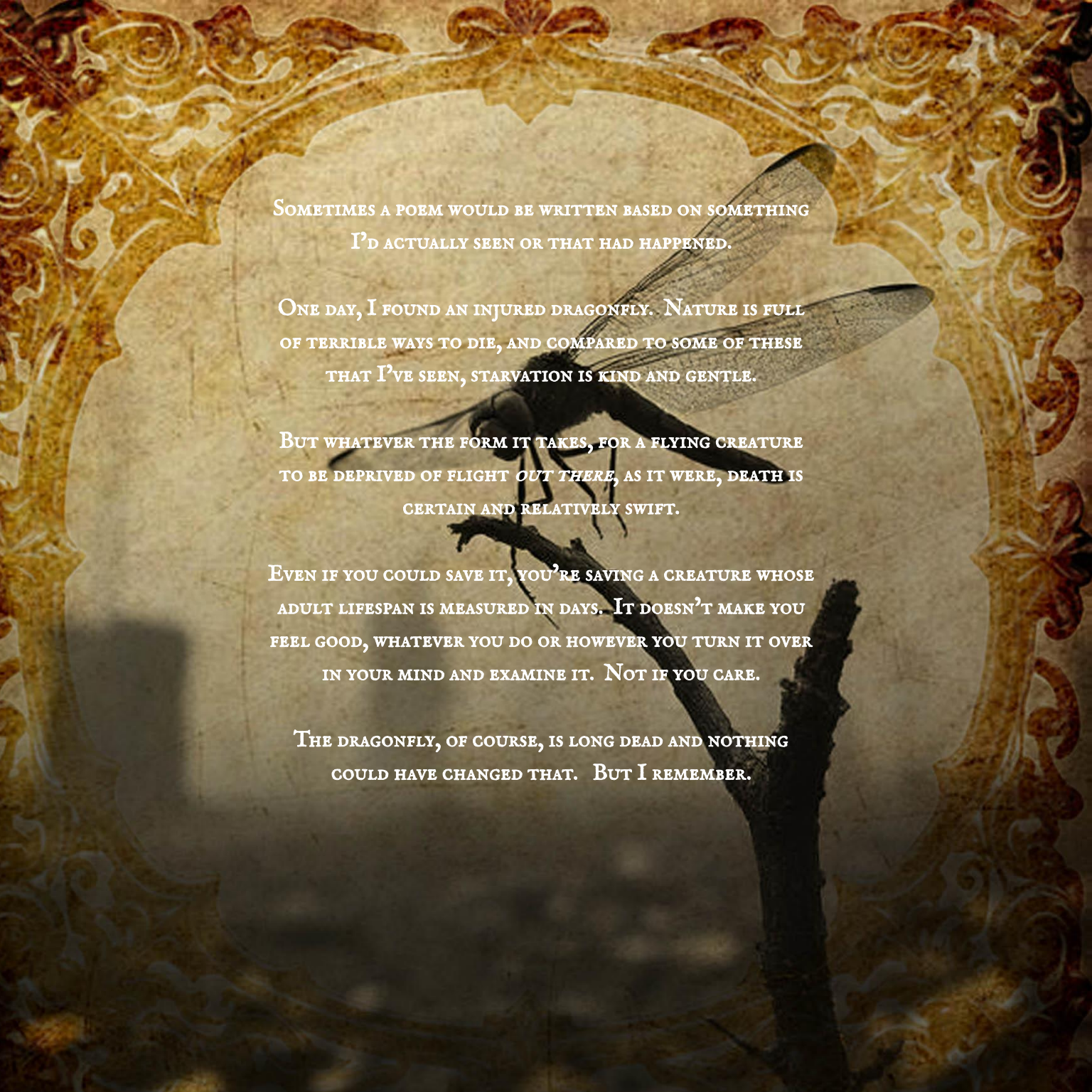
In the living mind,
In the eye:
Ideas live,
Whims die.
A thousand whirling points of thought;
What might be,
And to what ought-

And in here we live or die,
The profoundest of truth,
The most blatant lie,
Here, it is we go to rest,
With ourselves,
And with the rest

We cannot escape,
Nor can we go,
Thoughts loudly falling like silent snow,
Here, the final judge and jury,
Self-appointed, self-empowered,
Our own mercy or fury

You cannot run, you cannot hide,
No solace here,
No truth, no lie,
No shelter in a stranger's arms,
Only facts,
As cold as stars.
Bars of iron, bars of steel,
No such things here,
Jail you can't feel.

Bars of brain and of thought,
Who is here to say what ought,
To be here or not to be
They eyes see out, and back in at me



Sometimes a poem would be written based on something I'd actually seen or that had happened.

One day, I found an injured dragonfly. Nature is full of terrible ways to die, and compared to some of these that I've seen, starvation is kind and gentle.

But whatever the form it takes, for a flying creature to be deprived of flight *out there*, as it were, death is certain and relatively swift.

Even if you could save it, you're saving a creature whose adult lifespan is measured in days. It doesn't make you feel good, whatever you do or however you turn it over in your mind and examine it. Not if you care.

The dragonfly, of course, is long dead and nothing could have changed that. But I remember.

DRAGONFLY

Perching there with trembling wings
As if shaking off dewdrops would return the gift of flight,
As if it would mend torn wings,
And return the open sky.

O, dragonfly, what happened?
What tore away your wing?
What befell you in the night that did
So terrible a thing?

Now so still you perch there, having fallen from the sky,
And for you I write this requiem,
For you must now surely die;
And yet maybe you shall fly again,
If dragonflies have souls-
Now again they tremble,
As you stir your shredded wings to fly
And I turn away, and will not watch.

The Missing Key truly was a lost poem. I remembered it, and it's title. I remembered what it said, what 'happened' in it. But for some reason a bunch of my older poetry disappeared, and so to did *The Missing Key.*

Fortunately, it had been included in *The Seas are Made of Glass,* so I was able to recover it and re-add it to my file copies.

While I don't know why it disappeared, I do know where and more or less when it was written.

Once upon a time, I worked at a local theme park called King's Dominion, after the lions that had once been found along it's long-decommissioned safari monorail. I was in parking tolls at that time, and things were pretty relaxed. While stringing a pocket hammock in front of the bus lane annoyed security, I was nevertheless able to get most of the way through Final Fantasy III on the SNES in my toll booth by playing on a little portable television I brought in. Until I accidentally jostled the cartridge and erased my save file.

But we'd amuse ourselves in other ways during downtime as well, and sometimes me and another associate would have poetry writing contests. I... didn't exactly win.

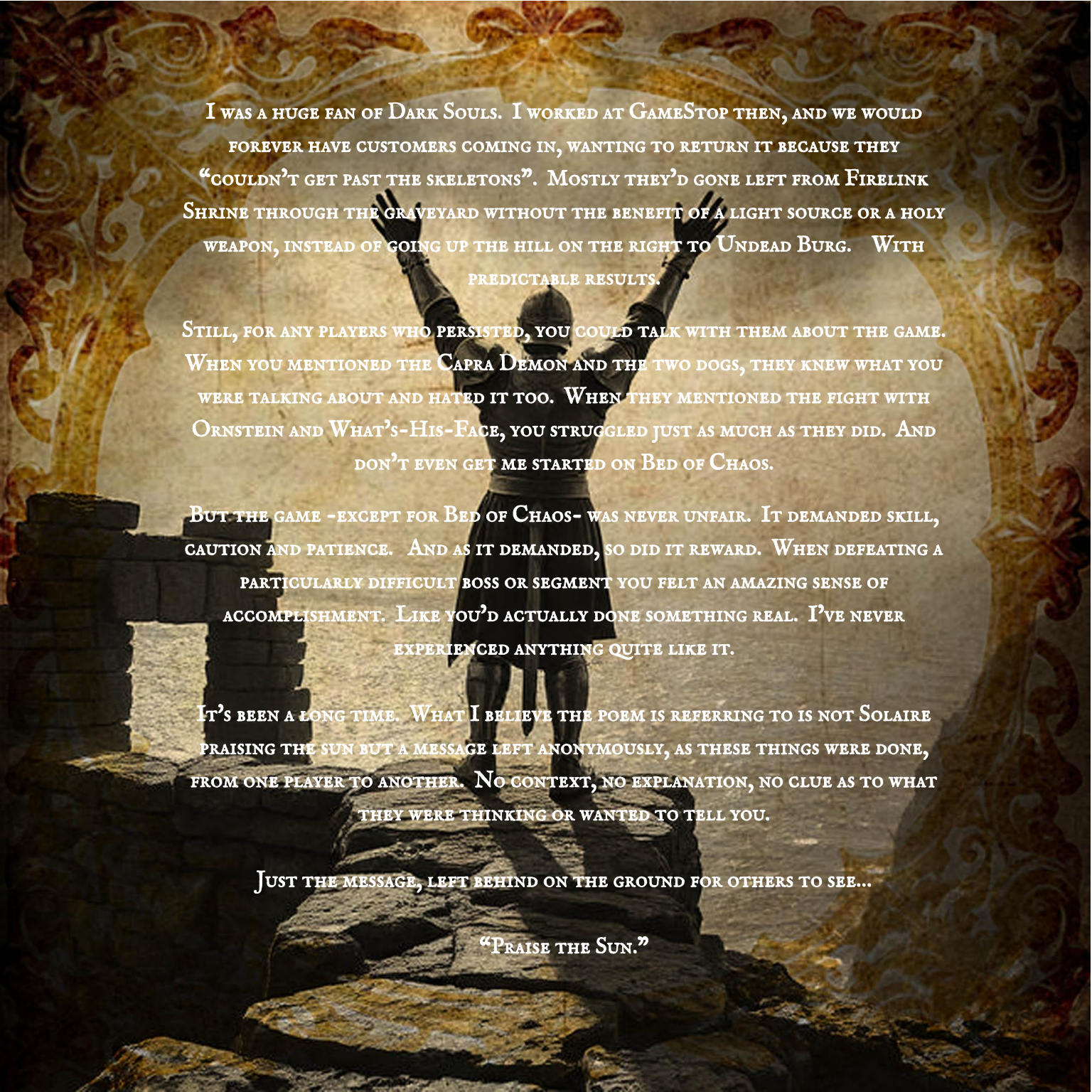
The Missing Key was one of the poems written at Kings Dominion, either for one of these contests or around the same time. It's simple and un-pretentious. And I do love the phrase "Flamingo-haunted ferns."

THE MISSING KEY

The brass key lay on the ground
Among the flamingo-haunted ferns
Shining dull-coppery in the damp green foliage.

A single bird wanders over
Curious,
A black-tipped beak investigates the shiny object.
Finding a lack of edibility,
Feathers ruffle, and wander off dissatisfied.

A single pink feather floats down
Down,
Down to rest
Among the ferns
Next to the key,
Shining dully among the flamingo-haunted ferns.



I was a huge fan of Dark Souls. I worked at GameStop then, and we would forever have customers coming in, wanting to return it because they "couldn't get past the skeletons". Mostly they'd gone left from Firelink Shrine through the graveyard without the benefit of a light source or a holy weapon, instead of going up the hill on the right to Undead Burg. With predictable results.

Still, for any players who persisted, you could talk with them about the game. When you mentioned the Capra Demon and the two dogs, they knew what you were talking about and hated it too. When they mentioned the fight with Ornstein and What's-His-Face, you struggled just as much as they did. And don't even get me started on Bed of Chaos.

But the game -except for Bed of Chaos- was never unfair. It demanded skill, caution and patience. And as it demanded, so did it reward. When defeating a particularly difficult boss or segment you felt an amazing sense of accomplishment. Like you'd actually done something real. I've never experienced anything quite like it.

It's been a long time. What I believe the poem is referring to is not Solaire praising the sun but a message left anonymously, as these things were done, from one player to another. No context, no explanation, no clue as to what they were thinking or wanted to tell you.

Just the message, left behind on the ground for others to see...

"Praise the Sun."

PRAISE THE SUN

Praise the sun!
The lines, like orange glow-worms snake across the ground.
Who knows why,
In triumph or surprise

Some... triumph over adversity,
Some lost soul,
Hollow, endarkened, beholding the light?

The words say nothing,
The words have no meaning,
They just are,
No advice, no warning,
Simply a statement of will under the world

Praise the sun!

In Poems this old, 'Brown Eyes' is always a reference to Moira. Any other color, from any point in time, indicates a person to whom there is no real-life counterpart. I can analyze these poems in this manner now, separated by the half a lifetime's worth of years from when they were written. It gives yields a glance into who I was and what I was thinking when I wrote them.

I do know, though, that this was not based on an actual event or occurrence. It's an idealized envisioning of a perfect moment. If it had happened, such an idealization would not have held up very well once reality was applied.

Things never happen like you imagine they will. Never.

I stopped writing poems for and about people a long time ago now. Before I stopped writing poetry altogether, I mean. I think perhaps I've lived too long, seen too much, become to disillusioned with the world at large to dream anymore and see in it anything but a fleeting dream.

The magic, if you wish to term it thus, is gone. Life does that to you. Youth, innocence, hopes, dreams, the belief that you can accomplish something... life laughs at these and mocks you for ever holding them dear.

And the secret is to keep holding on to them. But even knowing that, it isn't easy to do. Because you change. Somewhere, the person who write this and all the rest of these poems is still inside me. But things have moved on since then. I miss it, sometimes. Everything we left behind. But there's no going back.

EYES ON SKIN

Eyes on skin, tracing lines of fire,
The soft fire of candle flames;
In the endless moment of now
Stripped of agendas and of games

Heavy silence and the ticking clock
And brown eyes in the semi-darkness
Nor any cloth to intervene
Or movement, to disturb the stillness

The stillness of the moment, so perfect and long-awaited
To be relished and slowly savored;
And so, the clock ticks, dividing the minutes;
The air is still, and perfume-flavored.

Eyes on skin; tracing, caressing,
With promise, but not yet delivery,
Tracing lines of warmth,
Drinking in all there is to see

Candlelight from candles;
Exotic incense with not-quite placeable odor
Dark satin sheets reflecting the flames
And skin, and eyes thereupon, tracing lines of fire

The moment continues, alone
Apart from the world where so much is found wanting;
Just eyes, tracing soft fire over skin;
Promises, wrapped in silence, except for the ticking
Of the clock

What can I say? Roses are Parasites.

There actually *was* a Stephanie, I vaguely remember. This poem is not about her, though it may have been written for her. There was a lot of that going on back then; I remember names, but not the people to whom they belonged and I was always looking for an excuse or an idea to write. I liked this poem, I vaguely remember.

I can't for the life of me see why. There is something about it of interest, however, that caused me to include it in this album. It's the prototype of a story found in *The Crooked Path: Book of Unusual Fairy Tales* called *The Alchemyst and the Mirror*. For all intents and purposes, it's the same story told in a different, longer way. I think there's a recording of me reading it floating around somewhere.

Still, including this poem in the album was a difficult choice. It hasn't aged well and it was difficult to adapt.

In most cases, I haven't fixed errors and questionable word choices in order to preserve the text of the original verse unchanged. Even if there was a bit of cringe about it. Here, I made an exception: both to correct original bad writing and to allow it to be set to music. In the end, since this album is more about nostalgia than financial gain, I let it be.

I don't believe I ever knew what, specifically, Stephanie thought of it. But like *The Page of Poetry* there is a tiny grain of reality here, worked into the words.

STEPHANIE'S POEM

If it were not so pleasant I would not
Sit these hours here;
I would amuse myself in other ways
With this time so dear.
But I sit and I stare in a mirror
And what is there to say?
As I see stars and I see lives
Float along their way.

I would not light this candle
If I did so need the light
That through me and around me and in me
I would wrap the night.
So, I'm kept an absent company
By a ghastly yellow flame;
I know that here the candles
And the light are not the same.

The lights then fail, the mirror dark,
A yawning black abyss;
And she appears, a spectral image;
The ghost of a timeless kiss.
It would seem to me a memory,
But for the tear-streaks down my face.
The world slowly, slowly dissolves around me
Into no time or place.

Deeper and deeper into the void,
Lurid blackness all around,
Reality heaved in an eternal noise-
A noise without a sound
And with an eternal, tearing shriek
Lightning shot through the well.
The broken shards of mirror
Tinkled as they fell.

A hand lay on my shoulder,
A hand as cold as death;
Rose-thorns of ice pressed into my palm,
I gasped a frozen breath.
My fingers closed around the rose,
Its blood mixing with my own;
I closed my eyes and breathed the chilled perfume,
With chilly overtone.

What does one do with a second chance?
I gripped the hand on my shoulder with mine,
And held the black rose to my breast,
Its incense a dark design.
Icy lips brushed my neck,
And my clenched eyes could see,
As though they were wide open,
the way that it should be.

I'm crying over shards of my mirror,
And my lover cries with me;
Tears of salt and of red ice,
They match and mix freely.
I know in my heart that this blessed thing,
It cannot be right:
And yet I will not question
What has happened here tonight.

It ends with blood on the table
And on the mirror-shards
And tears are mixed into the blood
Because the moon was in the cards;
A skull stares with empty eyes,
And superfluous things which have no part
As the last of the tears and blood dry up,
Soaked into a midnight-rose's heart.

Song in a Bottle was written for... well, the name isn't important. She ended up as a character in a story I was writing at the time -hardly a unique occurrence and not of any particular importance either.

The poem, though, was not very well received and with one exception was the last poem I wrote for or to a specific person. Probably for the best, but it was nonetheless rather demoralizing.

I was impressed with it at the time. Some of my best work, or so I thought.

It was also a little bit of an exaggeration. Not so much about love itself than about love of the idea of the poem.

The part about the book was true, though. At least to the extent that she has a book in her hand, and I couldn't remember what it was called. I suppose what I remember most about her after all this time is that she was indirectly responsible for significantly expanding my tastes. That, and she had a sealed collector's edition of the third .Hack//GU game for PlayStation 2 which at that time was worth a fortune. I only ever had the standard editions of all the .hack games on ps2.

SONG IN A BOTTLE

Though I wish in spirit that things were other-wise
I wish now for your presence that I might see into your eyes
As I speak the fateful words which instead I now must write-
In the dark, and secret, with candle-flame for light-
That I might read the future in the waters of your soul
And if there be a cost to pay, to know full well the toll.

For my heart is turned towards you, and perhaps so towards despair
For your own heart I do not know, nor to what extent you care.
There is a tale that I might tell, if only just to you;
And I can't say that it happened, but I can say that it is true
That two there were, who searched for love, where they thought it might be found
His eyes had seen both life and death, but hers were bright and hazel-brown;

But there was no happy ending when they went their separate ways
Though the story is much longer, when told in other ways.
Now, the story is not pointless; you can see that this is true
For they had not each other; And me- well, I want you.
I want you to know my secrets, and you to know my heart,
And you to know my bed as well, and I know every part

Of anatomy, as it might be, between us in candle-light.
And now you see what troubles me, or so I hope you might,
That in opening my heart to you I pay in bitter tears,
Lamenting for what might have been as days turn into years.
And yet- I'll always see you as I saw when first we met
And if time shall dim my memory, it hasn't happened yet

For I knew in that one moment, when I saw you standing there
That our story had been written, and I tried hard not to stare
But what words engraved in scarlet on the cover of that book
The author put, I do not know, or was too taken with you to look.
Now my candles both burn low and the kitten wants to play
So in a bottle these words go, and I will them float away.

And not with flowers of rose or thistle, or perfumed scent of love
Do I consign my heart to you, nor with tears or blood;
But with a sigh that, seeing now, the fateful die is cast
And with a kiss upon the page; closest to you, and last.

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What cannot be saved may still be remembered; and one is not dead whose name is still spoken.

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All that I could Save: The Lost Poetry of Eric Atkinson

2025